WORLD CHRONICLE

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PROGRAMME: "WORLD CHRONICLE"

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for Disarmament Affairs

JOURNALISTS: Paul Lewis, The New York Times
Evgueni Menkes, TASS
Bhaskar Menon, PTI-TV, India

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SYNOPSIS

Thaw in East/West Relations

Yasushi Akashi, U.N. Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, addresses a variety of questions posed by the thaw in East/West relations, including the sale of arms to the Third World, greater public awareness of military spending procedures, negotiations at the Geneva Disarmament Conference and nuclear non-proliferation. Mr. Akashi notes that initial verification of disarmament procedures can cost millions, but the peace dividends which follow produce great savings.

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VOICE From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns and this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

After 45 years, the cold war in Europe is over and the Berlin Wall has been torn down for souvenirs. But there are other artifacts not so easily disposed of -- the weapons which for so long created a balance of terror. At the United Nations 45th General Assembly, there's new hope that rapidly changing East-West relations are producing the best opportunity in years for new arms control.

Our guest today, Yasushi Akasi, is United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs. He will be interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by: Paul Lewis of The New York Times; Evgueni Menkes of TASS; and Bhaskar Menon of PTI-TV of India.

Mr. Akashi, welcome to **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Under-Secretary-General, you are the head of the Department for Disarmament Affairs, tell us a bit about the functions of that Department?

AKASHI: Yes. Mr. Littlejohns, there are a number of committees and conferences dealing with disarmament matters in the U.N., for instance the First Committee of the General Assembly, the U.N. Disarmament Commission, which is a subsidiary

body of the Assembly, and the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva which consists of 40 countries. We have to service these committees by preparing studies, reports of all kinds. In addition, we have publications and information programmes dealing with arms control and disarmament matters and we have certain monitoring, analysis functions also in the area of disarmament to be able to serve as best as we can the Secretary-General's functions in the area of peace, security and arms control.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do you have a sort of propaganda function as well? I mean, are you propagandizing Member States to do more to bring about disarmament?

AKASHI: We disseminate as objective and as impartial information as we can dealing with all aspects of disarmament, particularly global disarmament.

LITTLEJOHNS: The people on your staff, what kind of specialties do they have in order to be experts on the subject of disarmament?

AKASHI: Some of them are political scientists, others are international lawyers, others are arms control specialists and some of them are particularly strong in the area of verification or analysis but we have a very, very small department so a lot of them have to double in different tasks and functions.

LITTLEJOHNS: Are some of them military people who are now intent on beating their swords into ploughshares?

AKASHI: We have some with military background and I feel very strongly that the military people should best be

associated with these efforts if disarmament is to be a very realistic, pragmatic function, not just simply idealistic aims to be enunciated in the General Assembly.

LEWIS: Disarmament agreements generally speaking are made between military alliances or between countries and they're verified by these alliances or by these countries and they're negotiated by the governments concerned so I don't really see what the role of the United Nations is? I can understand that there is a role perhaps for servicing the Conference in Geneva which deals with chemical weapons and where we hope to have an agreement but I'm not quite sure that I understand how the United Nations in New York can be involved in disarmament?

AKASHI: You might say, Mr. Lewis, that there are two major functions in the United Nations dealing with disarmament, one is a negotiating function -- and you have mentioned the negotiations which are ongoing in Geneva dealing with chemical weapons -- the other function is deliberative. The U.N., as the representative voice of the global community, has to pronounce itself on the principles and priorities of disarmament. For instance, in the past couple of years, the UNDC, Disarmament Commission, has been able to reach agreement on a set of principles on confidence-building measures to increase greater transparency in dealing with military matters for instance. In the same manner, it has been able to reach agreement on a set of principles on verification which is a very necessary, indispensable part of disarmament treaties and agreements and in this manner the disarmament bodies of the U.N., which represent virtually all Member States of the world, can have a leading function as to where the international community stands, what they consider to be the most urgent subject matters, aside from questions which interest the two major powers or the major alliances.

MENKES: Mr. Akashi, there is a fashionable expression at the U.N. these days. They say it is necessary to pay for peace, how do I understand that? What is behind that?

AKASHI: Yes, that's interesting. That's the sort of the opposite side of the coin in which people become very enthusiastic as considerable payoffs of disarmament which they call peace dividends. But as you say, as your question implies, I think there is a considerable cost to disarmament, the cost of destruction of weapons, the cost of converting some of the weapons for peaceful purposes and the cost of retraining workers and other specialists involved in arms production for peaceful purposes and in addition, there will be considerable costs in setting up a verification system of these agreements. For instance, the international community pays approximately six million dollars to ensure, through the International Atomic Energy Agency, the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and it is estimated that the chemical weapons convention, which is now under negotiation in Geneva, may cost somewhere between $200-$300 million annually as the cost of verification because in large countries there are hundreds of pharmaceutical and chemical industry facilities and plants which have to be inspected. So disarmament in the short run can be quite expensive while in the long run I'm sure that there will be considerable economic benefits as well as political benefits.

MENON: Mr. Akashi, the Third World, the developing countries of the world, have been seen mainly as onlookers to this whole process of disarmament but in actual fact they've been the people who have been dying the most during this period of cold war, how do you see disarmament in the processes that are now afoot in Europe affecting the Third World?

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AKASHI: According to the World Bank, if the military budgets of NATO countries are reduced by ten percent that could double the economic assistance given to Third World countries, developing countries. On the other hand, there is also other World Bank data which shows that developing countries in the 1980's have spent five times as much on military expenditures as the amount of aid they received from developed countries and the amount of arms they have bought from developed countries amount approximately to the same as the total expenditure they spent on health, so I think we have to think very hard on how best the international community can conduct disarmament in a realistic manner and in a manner to benefit the international community as a whole. I think we have to make sure that redundant arms produced as a result of these agreements in Europe and between NATO and Warsaw pact countries do not find their way to developing countries so there are these things which we have to consider rather urgently as we consider these matters.

LEWIS: Surely the will to disarm seems only to exist among the Northern industrial countries? The Southern developing countries appear to have very little interest in disarmament and as you just eloquently said they are spending far too much money on it which they could use for other purposes, so my question is what can the U.N. do to try to get developing countries to cut back their expenditure on armaments?

AKASHI: Mr. Lewis, as the cold war recedes and as we move away from the East/West confrontation, we see very serious divergence of perspectives and viewpoints and concerns between the so-called North and the South and I have the impression that disarmament and arms control questions will be also shifting gradually to the questions of the Third World where, as you have rightly said, there are still many hot beds,

mutual suspicions, tensions among these countries, and I think we have to do our best to promote regional disarmament, regional confidence-building measures as well as regional peace-making among these countries. For instance, the Helsinki process which started in Helsinki and completed, at least its first generation in Stockholm, which has brought about many fruitful results in raising the level of confidence between the antagonistic alliances in Europe may have some very relevant lessons for the Third World. Of course, they cannot be adopted without modifications and without taking into account characteristics of each region and sub-region but I think a global dialogue on the total arms race and disarmament matters in the world will produce many beneficial effects and we have three regional centres for peace and disarmament in Africa, in Asia and in Latin America and through these centres we are trying to do a lot for the developing countries to arouse their interest in disarmament.

MENKES: Mr. Akashi, the tempo of talks in the Geneva Conference on Disarmament is considered by many to be too slow, would you agree to that? Do you think that the Geneva Conference on Disarmament could work much more effectively?

AKASHI: Yes and no. I think they have been doing very serious, strenuous work as disarmament specialists and technicians but they can benefit also from more political input from their top leaders in government, so I welcome the proposal recently made in Geneva and endorsed by the U.N. Secretary-General, Perez de Cuellar, that the Conference on Disarmament should meet at the level of foreign ministers to infuse new energy and new commitment to the chemical weapons negotiations. So there has to be a happy marriage and harmonization of technical and specialist know-how with political will.

LITTLEJOHNS: The programme is **WORLD CHRONICLE.** Our guest is Yasushi Akashi, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs.

MENON: One of the problems with the arms situation in the world is how little people know about it. For instance, in the Iran/Iraq war a U.N. study I think says something like 41 countries were selling arms to one or the other country and 11 countries were selling to both sides. When we're looking at a world in which there is a disarmament process on in Europe what's the U.N. doing to make sure that these arms aren't being supplied to other parts, to developing countries, to encourage them to fight?

AKASHI: As you know, the question of arms export or arms transfer had for many years been a taboo subject in the U.N. I'm very happy that this taboo was broken two years ago by efforts of countries like Italy, Colombia and a few others and we have an ongoing study by a group of governmental experts to introduce greater transparency in arms transfer and the U.N. Secretary-General, in his recent annual report, proposed establishment of an international register for arms transfers. I know there are many stumbling blocks on the way but I'm happy that more and more countries accept openness and transparency in these matters and many countries can also take unilateral or regional action by tightening up their national legislation or group consultations to have transparency introduced and to make sure that dangerous arms are not sold to countries in serious conflict areas. But you have to look at it from the suppliers side as well as from the importers side and a one-sided, simplified approach simply will not be acceptable but we are working very hard on this matter and this is a subject of increasing concern by the international community and I can see it from the general debate in the current General Assembly.

LEWIS: Can we go back to the chemical weapons negotiations in Geneva which are under U.N. auspices because the situation is very strange? The United States and the Soviet Union have negotiated a private pact for getting rid of their chemical weapons yet it seems that the rest of the world can't agree to do the same and Mr. Shevardnadze, the Soviet Foreign Minister, was very rude about the Geneva negotiations when he spoke to the General Assembly recently so what is going on there? Why is it so difficult to get other countries to give up chemical weapons?

AKASHI: Mr. Lewis, global negotiation with more than 160 actors is always more complicated than negotiations between two countries or a group of countries which have after all some similar backgrounds -- geographically, culturally and otherwise -- and yet chemical weapons are a very good example of a subject matter more suitable for global negotiations because as these weapons are called the poor man's nuclear weapons, they can be easily manufactured by small, very poor countries, and if the agreement is to stick you have to have global consensus. It is not enough for the Soviet Union and the United States to agree on this and many smaller countries have a legitimate right to speak up and there are difficult questions of verification of the control mechanism and the kind of assistance and protection which smaller states expect from the bigger ones if this convention comes into force, so there are many aspects of this chemical weapons questions which call for very detailed consideration but I share the sense of frustration and impatience at what has been taking place.

LEWIS: Exactly, but is a major problem that the Arabs will not give up chemical weapons unless Israel renounces nuclear weapons?

AKASHI: I think there has to be a balanced approach with regard to renunciation of weapons of mass destruction. In this connexion we have just produced, with the assistance of three eminent experts, measures which can be taken to establish a nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East. Here again, it will not be easy. It will be a series of political steps for greater mutual security and assurance that you can have elimination of nuclear or other dangerous weapons from such areas as the Middle East.

MENKES: Mr. Akashi, there is an idea of creating an international mechanism at the United Nations which would deal specifically with the issue of prevention of proliferation of the newest types of weapons and the corresponding technologies, do you believe it is a viable idea?

AKASHI: I think it is extremely difficult to control or restrict the flow of science and technology and of course science and technology has two faces -- it's tremendous potential to contribute to the welfare of humanity and it can be used, as you imply, for the manufacturing and refining of weapons of all kinds. And this subject is on the agenda of the General Assembly and here again greater transparency, greater exchange of information, greater interchange between scientists from different countries and between scientists and the diplomats and the politicians is a very useful measure of confidence. But it's a fascinating subject and with the co-operation of scientists at the Pugwash Conference and others we are promoting in-depth discussion on this matter but approaches such as making a sort of code of conduct for scientists to refrain from co-operating for manufacturing of weapons would not work in my opinion.

MENON: Mr. Akashi, the nuclear non-proliferation treaty review conference ended in failure a few weeks ago mainly because the developing countries, the non-aligned countries rather, refused to accept any longer a face-saving, papering over of differences mainly on the issue of stopping nuclear testing which is one of the cardinal or the key points of the treaty, where does that leave the treaty which has to be renewed in 1995 and where does leave the whole process of non-proliferation?

AKASHI: Mr. Menon, I was very disappointed by the outcome of the Review Conference of the Non-proliferation Treaty. Finally a compromise could not be reached on the balance between the cardinal importance of preserving and strengthening the non-proliferation regime and the desirability of concluding a comprehensive test ban as soon as possible. As you know, the United States has its strategy position on this matter, it feels that nuclear weapons have to be tested for reliability and for refinement if its notion of even minimum deterrence is to be safeguarded while a great majority of countries feel that there are more than enough nuclear weapons which are sophisticated enough therefore the time is right for a comprehensive test ban. I don't think the Review Conference was a total failure, I think it had many agreements on for instance reinforcement of a safeguard system through the International Atomic Energy Agency with regard to additional security weapons for non-nuclear weapons states and it was very pleasing to see France and China attending the Conference for the first time as observers. So there are encouraging aspects but the Conference could not adopt a final declaration, but I hope the momentum for non-proliferation of nuclear arms will continue and with regard to the test ban issue also negotiations will continue and as you know the Soviet Union and the United States are continuing their negotiations for the step-by-step restrictions of these arms.

Let's hope that there will be some concrete results in the very near future otherwise the impatience of the non-aligned countries can intensify.

LEWIS: I was going to ask you whether you could tell us something about the attempts being made to promote greater transparency in military budgets and also to have some sort of a register of arms sales to the Third World so we know who exactly is selling what to whom?

AKASHI: We already have a U.N. standard mechanism for reporting on military expenditures. Unfortunately, this method has been made use of only by about 20 countries, mostly from the West, but I am glad to see that more and more former socialist countries are making use of this device and I think this is a very useful device for mutual confidence to enable countries to see how much each other is spending for arms and so there is clearly a tendency for greater openness and transparency. With regard to arms expenditure as such we do not have a standard mechanism here but would very much welcome initiatives of interested countries to start reporting to the U.N. on this matter as well and I'm sure that there will be more and more interest in expanding, in introducing a greater measure of sophistication to these reporting instruments at the U.N. and we are also interested in modernizing our data base dealing with disarmament and arms control at the United Nations.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Akashi, I guess that the Gulf crisis has probably made the task of disarmament a little bit more difficult and the peace dividend left for Saudi Arabia as somebody pointed out in the few seconds we have left do you think that this is the situation? It's going to be more difficult?

AKASHI: I think that not all is lost because of the Gulf situation.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm afraid that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

Our guest has been Yasushi Akashi, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs. He was interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by: Paul Lewis of The New York Times; Evgueni Menkes of TASS and Bhaskar Menon of PTI-TV of India.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

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